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Senior Recital: Stephen Ahearn, clarinet

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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SENIOR RECITAL

Stephen Ahearn, clarinet

assisted by

Joanne Kong, piano
Matt McCabe, sound
Katie Dixon, viola
Laura Ann Boyd, soprano



APRIL 20, 2000, 8:00 PM
PERKINSON RECITAL HALL

PROGRAM

Diversions (1972)

Playful
Reminiscences
A Dialogue with Interruptions

Allan Blank
(b. 1925)

Empty Arms (2000)

Waiting For Winter
Open Arms
Movie Theater Haiku
The Other

Stephen Ahearn

Laura Ann Boyd, soprano

Sonata for piano and clarinet in F-minor, op. 120, no. 1 (1894)

Allegro appassionato
Andante un poco adagio
Vivace

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Joanne Kong, piano

• • • INTERMISSION • • •

New York Counterpoint (1985)

Matt McCabe, sound

Steve Reich
(b. 1936)

Acht Stücke (1910)

No. 2 in B minor
No. 4 in D minor
No. 6 in G minor

Max Bruch
(1838-1920)

Joanne Kong, piano
Kathrine Dixon, viola

PROGRAM NOTES

DIVERSIONS (1972)

Born in New York City, Allan Blank studied violin at the High School of Music and Art. He went on to study conducting at the Juilliard School of Music. He did not devote himself entirely to composition until 1952 after a short stint as a violinist with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. From 1978 to 1996 he taught at Virginia Commonwealth University and is now Professor Emeritus.

Blank has been awarded many commissions and honors for his operas, symphonic works, choral and vocal pieces, and chamber music. These include a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for his opera *The Magic Bonbon*, The Erik Satie Mostly Tonal Award, First Prize in the George Eastman Competition and the Annual Choral Competition of the Chautauqua Singers. He has also been the recipient of multiple commissions from the Virginia Music Teachers Association. His works have been recorded on the CRI, Orion, Advance, Open Loop, Titanic, Centaur, Pro Viva, North/South, and Contemporary Record Society labels.

Blank describes *Diversions* in the following manner: “*Diversions* is the second of two works for solo clarinet written in 1972. It is in three movements. The first, marked ‘Playful,’ concerns itself with expansions and contractions on a number of short motifs. These change their role of importance as they interact on one another. The second, ‘Reminiscences,’ is nostalgic in mood. The opening line gradually yields to secondary features and closes with a quick puckish figure that touches on the playfulness of the first movement. The final movement, ‘A Dialogue With Interruptions,’ expands in opposite directions and in various registers, it has a chatty busy character. The interruptions consist of fast scale-like patterns, stentorian and assertive phrases, or soft ideas recalling the second movement. All the ideas in this movement can be linked with character types, and ultimately relate to the playfulness of the first movement.”

EMPTY ARMS (2000)

Empty Arms is based on four poems of my friend of four years, Chris Robley. Each poem deals with relationships, but is told strictly in the first person. I have always been attracted to Chris’ “relationship poems” (I hesitate to call them love poems) because of their honesty, wit, slightly aberrant nature, and of course because they usually hit home with me. I will say nothing more of them here, for I feel that they speak for themselves.

In *Empty Arms* I explore the relationship between the voice and the clarinet. Specifically, I set out to write a piece that existed along a continuum. The voice remains a purveyor of melody and lyrics, while the clarinet shifts between the role of accompaniment and “second soprano.” I attempt to keep the relationship between the instruments as true to the relationship portrayed in the poetry as possible. The work is intended to be highly accessible, but experiment with worthwhile harmonic, melodic and structural ideas. I felt that the duality of such a piece would do some justice to the beauty of Chris’ poems. I hope that he agrees.

Waiting For Winter

A boy hangs with one limber limb
From a newly pink-blossomed cherry tree outside your window

The tree to be cut in autumn,
Black rooted in chunks of pig-mulch now, will remain straight all
through

Spring's rain. It would be too wet to trim
Down to firewood and there'd be no use for it yet anyhow.

Is there nothing to be said for the fact that I want you?

Open Arms

Gaped as the salivating mouth
Teeth-fingers tingling like tasseled ornament

On the cold inviting sheath of arms
Sparked in the embrace

Surprised that in your crisp polished clothes
There is warm flesh beating

Movie Theatre Haiku

This old ticket stub
Reminds me of your breasts that
I praised in darkness

The Other

World that walks beside me, constant
In its stride at every instance

Of rememory. Like Narcissus-
Soul-mate, past life, almost incestuous

Partner of my own separation from shadow.
In fact, Mirror, she is my shadow, and says to

Me, "Never forget that I am always not here."

SONATA FOR PIANO AND CLARINET IN F MINOR (1894)

Brahms had laid down his pen in October of 1890, informing his publisher in a letter that "on leaving Ischl [I had] thrown a lot of torn-up manuscript paper into the Traun." However, upon hearing the Meiningen Court Orchestra in 1891, he was inspired to write again by the playing of the self-taught clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld. Brahms' relationship with Mühlfeld brought about his last four chamber works: the Clarinet Trio in A minor, the Clarinet quintet in B minor, and the two sonatas for piano and clarinet of Opus 120. He took the time and effort to publish versions of the sonatas for viola (which remained virtually unchanged) and for violin (which required some changes in the piano part), arguably implying that he desired the works to reach as wide an audience as possible.

Sonata no. 1 is orthodox in outline, turbulent outer movements surrounding the introspective slow movement and the intermezzo. However, each movement is typically Brahmsian in its elusive and original use of traditional forms. In addition, the piano is never heard merely accompanying the clarinet, as is hinted at by the order of instruments in the title.

NEW YORK COUNTERPOINT (1985)

A native of New York, Reich received his Bachelors of Arts in philosophy from Cornell University. He went on to earn his Masters of Art in music from Mills College, where he studied with Darius Milhaud and Luciano Berio. Soon thereafter, Reich stumbled across the compositional process of phasing while working with a tape machine in the San Francisco Tape Center. Reich states in his book, *Writings About Music*, that the purpose of phasing was to create a new musical process. "I do not mean the process of composition, but rather pieces of music that are, literally, processes. ...What I'm interested in is a compositional process and a sounding that are one and the same thing."

Reich went on to form a flexible performing group "Steve Reich and Musicians" dedicated to the performance of his work. His subsequent compositions and the evolution of his application of the phasing technique in various forms eventually pushed minimalism into the mainstream orchestral repertoire with the performance of *Tehellim* by the New York Philharmonic in 1982.

New York Counterpoint marks a return to the tape machine for Reich, this time in combination with an acoustic instrument. He describes the content of the work as follows: "*New York Counterpoint* is in three movements: fast-slow-fast, played one after the other without pause. The change of tempo is abrupt and in the simple relation of 1:2. The piece is in the meter $3/2 = 6/4 (=12/8)$. As is often the case when I write in this meter, there is an ambiguity between whether one hears measures of 3 groups of 4 eighth notes, or 4 groups of 3 eighth notes. In the last movement of *New York Counterpoint* the bass clarinets function to accent first one and then the other of these possibilities, while the upper clarinets essentially do not change. The effect, by change of accent, is to vary the perception of that which is in fact not changing." *New York Counterpoint* was originally commissioned for clarinetist Richard Stoltzman.

ACHT STÜCKE (1910)

Bruch had an affinity for writing music that would be easily assimilated by the public, drawing from the folk music of various countries. However, this inclination led him to compose works that were not in the fashion of his German peers at the turn of the century. As a result of this, his contemporaries never considered him as having lived up to his potential. The importance of his contribution to the German repertoire was not recognized until relatively late in life when he was given a masterclass in composition at the Berlin Academy. He taught there until his retirement in 1910.

Acht Stücke (Eight Pieces) was undeniably inspired by the two major works for Clarinet Trio that preceded it, Mozart's *Kegelstatt Trio* and Schumann's *Marchenerzahlungen*. Written at the age of 72, the work shows Bruch's propensity for nostalgia that led it to be out of touch with the musical trends of the first decade of the twentieth century. However, the intrinsic beauty of the simple form of each piece makes them an important addition to the trio repertoire. No. 2, 4 and 6 are all in the traditional song form, and rely on typically Romantic melodies. Bruch himself argued against a complete performance of all eight movements in concert.